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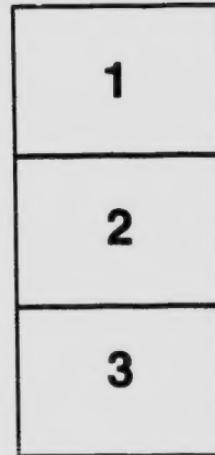
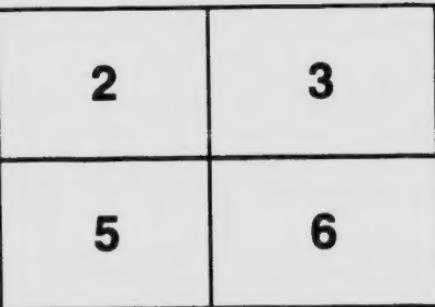
Mary E. (Pritchard) Charters

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Dear Mr. Atton:

I take the liberty of presenting you with this little story written eight years ago when I was a student doing mission work on the Nashwaak. In the midst of some of my numerous difficulties there I recalled a story once told me by Mr. Robert Watson, now of St. Mary's, of a happy reconciliation which he had seen take place at a revival service between two estranged church members.

But the local scene in the story was strange to me. I, therefore, without doing any violence to the facts as related, substituted for the revival meeting, one of the many Communion scenes which I had often witnessed in the old church at Red Bank, Chipman, Queen's County.

I recognize that the story is far from being perfect; most of it was scribbled off hastily during a single outdoor afternoon with a cradle-knoll for desk. It was never re-written or changed in any way. Rev. J. A. Macdunnald in accepting it for THE WESTMINSTER wrote me that he meant to improve the communion scene by editing and adding to it, but on

later reading of it, he did the little sketch the honor of saying that he had changed his mind and would run the story untouched lest it should suffer by any changes he might make.

The story has been re-printed several times; and I frequently receive requests for copies of it. Speaking personally I may say I like it better than anything I have yet written. The many kind words spoken of the sketch by friends, the demand for it, most of all the hope that it may be useful as a means toward changing strife into concord and strengthening the hands of the peacemakers in our church--this hope, rather than any conviction of merit in the story, is my reason and apology for presenting you, along with my Christmas compliments and regards, with this little booklet.

Yours truly,
Frank Baird

R.A.
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"G



OIN to law ! Aleck
Duncan an' Sam Mil-
ler !"

Stephen McPhail slid
the reins from his neck,
hung them on his
plough - handles, and
came towards the fence. He look-
ed his neighbor seriously in the
face.

"John, ye don't tell me so. Why
they're both elders in the kirk."

"No differ, it seems ; I have it
from Sam himself. Says Aleck
ain't been usin' him right."

"An' it's 'bout the horse?"

"Yes, yes, all 'bout the horse—
the one Sam let Aleck have las' fall
to work in 'the woods,' ye know."

"But Sam 'ad consented to take
the fifty dollars, I heerd."

"He should uv; but he wouldn't;
he's wantin' seventy-five now, an'
this Aleck won't give 'im. Says
he'll let it go to the law 'fore he
does, for the horse warn't worth a
cent more'n he offered him the week
after it died."

"Aleck'll still gi' 'im the fifty?"

"Yes, yes, an' along with that
he'll let Sam ha' another horse till
he's through croppin' this spring."

"An' Sam won't?"

"Naw, naw, he'll naw consent.

Sam's dour, ye know; so's Aleck for that matter."

McPhail nodded assent. "Wall, wall, wall," he said slowly after a little; "has it come to this 'mong us elders?"

There was a long pause. McPhail's horses stamped and switch-ed because of the flies. The fresh smell of the new-turned sod came over to the fence.

"Good lan' that, ain't it, Steve?"
"Not bad."

There was another pause. Both men were thinking. McPhail turned around and looked away.

"There were only the five o' us, an' now here's two o' us a-going to law. Yes an' Aleck representative elder, too!" he said. "Wall, wall, wall! who'd ever uv thought o' the likes o' this!"

"It's Sac-er-ment day, too, four weeks agin Sunday now. It's goin' to look varra bad then, as my woman was sayin' to me las' night. Wonder if somethin' couldn't be done 'fore then?"

Elder McPhail was still standing, his elbow on t'ie fence and his hand to his cheek, looking out over his meadow.

"Might be," he said turning; "you see Sam again an' I'll see Aleck. S'pose it'd do any good?"

"P'r'aps it might; 'n awful thing to see them this way. William's sick, an' not like ever to be any better; so it'd leave only you an' me to serve. They might think better uv it."

Before separating the two men arranged to see their brother elders, and prevail on them, if possible, to

settle their unfortunate dispute

* * * * *

It was full two weeks after that the minister of the charge was calling on one of the oldest members of his church, Andrew McLaughlin. He had read the thirty-fourth Psalm, prayed and risen to go.

But the old man held his hand.

"Sit doon a minute," he said, "an' tell me if it's true I hear 'boot Miller an' Duncan. Surely it canna be their naw goin' to the Sac-er-ment."

A sudden sadness came over the minister's face. He sat down. The old man drew close to him, then bent his ear to listen.

"I fear it is true—too true," the minister said. "I have done my best, but I fear with little success."

The old man's face fell. By-and-bye he spoke.

"Mister Campbell," he said ; "d'ye suppose they onderstan' the mistake they're makin'?"

The Communion service in the Scotch-Canadian churches is not looked on lightly. For a member, let alone an elder, to absent himself is rare indeed. It is always a subject of sincere enquiry, and much profound thought and prayer. The minister, when he came, had found this feeling regarding the solemn service and he had done his best to strengthen it; he had succeeded to.

The old man spoke again : "In fifty-seven year now," he said ; "I've not missed a service, but two. an' then I was away. It's a gran' thing to go to the Sac-er-ment," he said slowly; "it is, it is."

He steadied himself with his staff

and rose. "I drove to the field wi' John yesterday," he said ; "so I'd be gettin' used to the drivin' for Sabbath. This may be me las', an' I must naw miss it—me las' here I mean."

The minister got up and came away.

As he drove home not less than three of his people whom he met at different times asked him who the new members were to be this year. He could only say sadly he did not know of any yet. The leaven of discord had begun to work.

* * * * *

Nearly always, when the duty is unpleasant, we put off till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day. McPhail had hesitated about going to see Duncan. His duty was clear—he ought to go—but is it not true that one always proceeds hesitatingly when going to say to someone he ought to "make up with" someone else? One feels timid, afraid, ashamed. Something—and is it Satan, or what?—seems to say : "If people want to fight let them fight; what business is that of yours?"

But though McPhail hesitated, he went—the first wet day. Those are the days much of the travelling, and all of the talking is done in the country. There is no time for either other days.

He reached his brother elder's house and knocked. The door opened.

"Good morning, Alexander," he said.

The other elder welcomed him cordially.

"Come in man oot o' the rain," he said. "It's a bad day."

"Good for what's in the groun' though."

There was a short pause. McPhail took the seat near the stove.

A swish of rain struck the window. There were unfortunate hitches in the conversation now and then that rendered it embarrassing. It is always that way when the something intended is not being said.

By-and-bye McPhail brought the question up suddenly.

"Alexander," he said; "how's it twixt you an' Miller now?"

The other elder's eyes dropped to the floor. It was easy to see he was not surprised; he had expected this. He soon looked up and spoke:

"Steve, I've told Sam what I'll do. I'll give him the fifty dollars, an' a horse till he's done croppin'. Isn't that fair?"

"Seems fair 'nough, yes, but---"

"No use in talkin', Steve, Sam's askin' too much; he's unreasonable. The horse was twelve, spavined, an' short in the win'. The way horses are sellin' lately fifty dollars was a big price for Sam's."

"But—but it's lookin' bad in the eyes o' the community, Alexander, an, ye must min'"—McPhail spoke more earnestly and slowly—"ye must min', we're elders in the kirk."

"I've thought o' that; I've thought o' that often; that's what makes we wonner at him the more," Duncan said quickly.

If McPhail had hoped to bring about a reconciliation by getting Duncan to confess to being at least

partly in the wrong, this undeceived him. McPhail saw he must be more explicit.

"You're representative elder, Alexander, an' some are thinkin' ye ought—"

"Ay, an' the oldest o' the session an' he but the last pit in."

"But some were thinkin' it'd be better for the church if—"

"He were pit oot o' it a' thegither."

McPhail had not yet succeeded in making his point. He waited a moment. Another swish of rain pulsed against the window.

"But couldn't ye offer him five dollars more? Some were thinkin' if ye did perhaps—"

"Naw;" Duncan shook his head. "Steve, ye don't know the man as I do. It's no the fifty dollars he's objectin' to, it's peace."

The last word was spoken with a vehemence that McPhail had not noticed before. He feared he must fail in his mission.

"We're elders in the kirk," he ventured at length, but somewhat timidly; then, after a moment's pause, "it's Communion now in less'n ten days."

Alexander Duncan sat for a while—a great long while—looking fixedly out into the rain. McPhail watched him. Were the thoughts of the sacred service to have the desired effect?

Elder Duncan was a man of God. For thirty-four year he had served the Church. He had done his best, and had done right. And he felt he was doing the same now. There, as he stood looking into the rain,

he felt strongly he was "a man more sinned against than sinning." Men like to feel that.

But his thoughts came back to his fellow-elder's last words. He turned from the window

"Is it true," he said; "it's only ten days till Communion?"

There was a changed look on his face, McPhail thought, and a different tone in his voice, a softer look and a kinder tone.

"It's a pity, Steve," he said after a little; "a pity."

The rain ceased soon after that. In less than an hour McPhail was home.

* * * * *

It was ten days after and Sunday morning. There were people on their way to church.

"I was next behind Mrs. Miller," a woman was saying, "on Saturday I see the minister slip two tokens into her han'. I was tellin' my man, an' he was thinkin' one o' them must be for him.

"Duncan's to come I heerd," the other said, "but isn't to go forrit. That's what they're saying anyway, but I tell them it was no like Aleck Duncan to sit back o' a Sacer-ment day."

"My, oh my, it'll never do at all, at all," and the first spoke again, "to have an trouble the day. An elder o' the kirk not goin' forrit! The kirk wouldna stan' a month after; it couldna. Look how they investigate when on y a member doesna go; an think o' an elder! an' the representative elder too!"

The two women had come to the church. They went in. Already

there was a great crowd. But as yet those inside were mainly women and old people. The wide, old windows had been raised, and a fresh but warm breeze blew across the church fluttering bonnet strings and feathers; and not a few of these had been untouched by either sun or wind since the corresponding day a year before.

Outside carriages were driving smartly up; now and then there came great slow-moving farm wagons and set down at the broad platform half a congregation at once. The wide-reaching grove of woods,—for the old church to be near for ever ody had been put near to nobody, but in the centre of a stretch of country twenty-five miles by fifteen,—was alive with horses and groups of men. Across the sandy road from the chur' h was the graveyard. There were some in it too ; in bunches, or in twos or threes or ones, the people, most of them in black, and not a few women with long deep veils, moved here and there, almost in silence and not noticing each other, stooping now and then to put right a running vine that had gone wrong, to break down a tall rank weed, or,—and this not unfrequently,—to drop, now and then, a tear.

The crowd in and around the church, ranged, in age, from the tenderest infants up to those whose years had run in' o the nineties. The whole countryside had come—good, bad, indifferent. Across the river in canoes, up and down in boats ; from The Ridge, The Range, The The Mines, The Cove, The

Village, The Creek, The Forks, The Mills, and as many other places, the people had come, as for years, to the old "church in the wilderness." Sac-er-ment day came only once in a year. It was a great day. There was a tradition running back for sixty years that on that day it had never been known to rain.

Old men who had not met since last year were shaking hands and talking loudly in each other's ears. Now and then a person older than usual, or a cripple, was carefully helped from the carriage or wagon, then up the steps, and finally away along the aisle to one of the front seats. Boys and young men who had sadly outgrown their Sunday clothes during their winter in the woods, stood awkwardly about. There were girls there for the first time in "long dresses," and babies for the first time in short ones. But babies, boys, girls, men, women, old and young, all had on their best—it was "Sac-er-ment day."

Over all there seemed a spirit of quiet reverence. The groups in the graveyard whispered when they spoke at all, and even the bunches of men among the horses in the trees talked quietly.

Suddenly the quiet deepened. The groups from the different parts came towards the church. The minister had come and had gone in. I was noticed that a strange minister was with him.

The pews full, blocks kept for the purpose, were placed in the aisles, then planks were laid, and on these dozens of members were accommodated.

The sermon, as was customary, was by the visiting minister. This over, both ministers came down from the pulpit and took their places behind the small table.

"The Session," the pastor of the church said, and there was a deep tone of anxiety in his voice; "the Session will now come forward and be constituted." As he spoke, he raised his hand, but dropped his head.

There was a movement in the pews here and there, then a sound of heavy steps in the aisle. A few turned to look, but the great majority sat motionless. Here and there a head bowed. The movement through the church ceased, the footsteps stopped. The minister said "Let us pray!" The elders were before him; but there were only two.

The long rows of heads went down as when a wheat-field is swept with a September gust. For a long time the minister prayed. There was an undertone of pathos in the prayer: a melting tenderness that came from the heart and went to it.

The minister closed. "We will sing now," he said; "the thirty-fifth Paraphrase."

There was a long reverential pause. The flutter of Bible leaves made the only sound. By-and-bye even this ceased; then, the sweet sacred song broke spontaneously from a hundred voices.

There was no great swelling organ—no organ of any kind. There was no choir leader--no choir. The singers were not paid; some of them were out of tune. But the

homely, worshipful people were full of the spirit of Christ and of song, and they sang. Old "Wyndham" never sounded so sweetly sad before. It welled up to the crowded gallery and out to the broad platform where dozens sat in silence. Everybody caught it, and everybody sang:

" 'Twas on that night when doomed to know,
The eager rage of every foe,
That night in which he was betrayed,
The Saviour of the world took bread.'

There was a long pause at the end of the verse. Then the song swelled up and out in great waves again:

"And after thanks and glory given
To him that rules in earth and heaven,
That symbol of his flesh he broke,
And thus to all his followers spoke :

My broken body thus I give
For you, for all; take, eat and live;
And oft the sacred rite renew
That brings my wondrous love to view."

A pause came again longer than usual. There had been a tremulousness in the last two lines. A number had dropped out. But the song rose and went on.

"Then in his hands the cup He raised,
And God anew he thanked and praised,
While kindness—"

Heads here and there dropped to the pews in front. Old men and women had sung that as little boys and girls; and they stopped to think—the love of Christ constrained them. As the free wind swept into the church by the open windows, so, an overmastering sense of the love of Christ for man, had swept into the people's hearts with that song; it had surged up from the heart to the lips, and they refused to sing. Love sealed them.

A few voices, however, kept bravely on.

"While kindness in His bosom glowed,
And from His lips Salvation flowed."

They began another verse—the the last but one.

"My blood I thus pour forth, He cries,
To cleanse the soul in sin that lies
In this the cov-e—"

Suddenly the quiet was broken. The singers stopped. There were quick, unsteady steps up the crowded aisle. In a moment there stood before the congregation the firm-set figure of Elder Miller. His frame shook, and there were tears on his sun-brownèd face. He raised his voice and spoke :

"Is Aleck Duncan here?" he said.
No one spoke. The stillness was almost unbearable,

"Is Aleck Duncan here?" he asked again.

There was another silence. The sun streamed in above the window blind on the speaker's face. The warm wind blew across the church.

There was a stir in the further end of the gallery, and soon there were heavy steps sounding on the wooden stair. The other elder had understood.

In a moment more the estranged men met. They shook each other's hands, but they did not speak—not for a time.

"I should ha' taken your offer, Aleck, an—" one began to say, but the other stopped him.

"I felt I was wrong," he said, "I felt it was wrong to be there on a Sac-er-m^{ent} day."

He swung his big, brown hand towards the gallery, then drew it sharply across his face.

Slowly the congregation came to itself. The bowed heads raised. The look of a great, sudden peace came into the minister's face. The two elders took their places beside the others.

The voice that had held longest to the broken song caught it up again :

"In this the covenant is sealed,
And heaven's eternal grace re-
vealed."

The volume of song was thin at first, but it steadily swelled and grew. The shock wore away. The full realization of what had taken place during the break in the song—and it had been but a few moments in all—came slowly at



